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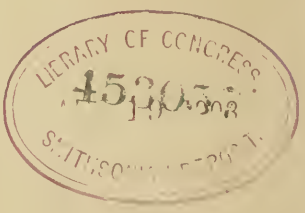
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS

By WILLIAM GOODELL FROST, Ph.D.



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HAND MILL

University Extension in the Southern Mountains

By William Goodell Frost, Ph.D.

THE picturesque adventures which we are to describe are somewhat of a satire upon the dignified work known as university extension, but they have the same purpose—to bring the best elements of civilization within reach of the people—and they have the primal pedagogic quality of adaptation.

To estimate the success of this adaptation we must know the country and the people. How shall the ideas which characterize a modern university be interpreted to the family of a moonshiner on "Hell-fer-sartin Creek"? Externally the inhabitants of the Southern mountains are not, at first glance, prepossessing. Their homespun garb, often in tatters, rude speech, and shuffling gait, might lead us to class them with the "poor white trash." But there could be no greater mistake. The landless, luckless "poor white," degraded by actual competition with slave labor, is far removed in spirit from the narrow-horizoned but proud owner of a mountain "boundary." The "poor white" is actually degraded; the mountain man is a person not yet graded up.

The mountaineer is to be regarded as a survival. From this point of view his variations from the regulation type of the American citizen are both interesting and instructive. In his speech you will soon detect the flavor of Chaucer; in his home you shall see the fireside industries of past ages; his very homicides are an honest survival of Saxon temper—in a word, he is our contemporary ancestor!

The causes which have retarded his development are not far to seek. Take the circle of Southern States east of the great river, and each of them, except Florida and Mississippi, has a mountain back yard of large proportions. Bunched together, these mountain fractions constitute one of the largest horseback areas on the globe. From Harper's Ferry to the iron hills of Birmingham, two hundred miles and more in width—"knobs," caves, ridges, forests—stretches this inland empire which we are beginning to recognize by the name of Appalachian America. It has no coast-line like Greece, no arms of the sea like Scotland, no inland lakes or navigable rivers like Switzerland. Is it any wonder that pioneer conditions have lingered in a country where the only highways are the beds of streams? The whole South has been very slow about "coming to town." The Governor of one of these States recently said that a quarter of the people had never seen the court-house in their own county. And the people on "Cutshin" or "No Bizness Branch" have a good excuse. Progress must be slow in a land of saddle-bags.

Our extension work began with a preliminary tour five years ago. Our mountain guide was an old soldier who had moved to Berea to educate his family. "Children was all gals—all but the least one—and there was a better show fer 'em to teach in the mountings than to raise craps." He could find some

MOUNTAIN GIRLS COMING TO BEREA

MOUNTAIN PREACHERS FROM THE BLUE RIDGE

kinsfolk or an old comrade in nearly every county.

The time chosen was August, when the roads are least forbidding, and the mountain schools in session. The outfit was a saddle, saddle pockets, extra woolen shirt, rubber blanket, insect powder, comb and tooth-brush, pocket knife, five dollars in silver dimes, a Testament, package of postal cards, and a few leaflets.

The general plan was to speak at the school-houses, sending a boy ahead to "norate" the people the day before. We could visit a school-house as early as eight o'clock in the morning, and by hard riding reach a second school-house by eleven. Here, after the "speakin'," we would be invited to "come by" with a neighbor, and take a "snack." Another ride would bring us to our third school-house, where we would speak, take supper in the neighborhood, and preach at "early candlelight." Our "gaited" horses, with their "running walk" or "single step," never fatigued us; invitations were plenty, chickens abundant, and week after week we kept up our four meetings a day. Saturday was set apart for rest, and on Sundays we planned to strike some "Association" meeting, or funeral.

The mountain funeral is a survival from the time when preachers were scarce. It rarely takes place at the time of interment. It will be remembered that the boy Lincoln had a funeral sermon preached for his mother long after her death. In the mountains it is a convenience to have this ceremony at a time when the roads will be passable, and there is likely to be a large gathering of kinsfolk. Several memorial sermons will sometimes be preached on the same day. The prominence thus given to funerals during the months of good roads assists the fatalistic doctrines of the preachers in giving a very somber cast to their religion.

The Association meetings are held in the summer for the same reason. In one thing it must be confessed the mountain people have degenerated—they have lost the great Protestant idea that a minister must be an educated man. A few of their preachers aspire to greater knowledge—several have moved to Berea and entered school. But the majority rather glory in their ability to speak "as the Spirit gives them utterance." And their utterance is loud. The present writer was invited to preach at one of these associations, and in the middle of his discourse one woman nudged another, with the remark, "I wish he'd quit talkin' and go to preachin'!"

MRS. YOCUM STARTING ON EXTENSION WORK

And it is sad to see that this class of preachers is still being replenished. One young man, persuaded to attend a Southern theological school, was back in three months fully equipped.

"Yas," he said, "the Seminary is a good place ter go and get rested up, but 'tain't while fer me ter go thar no more 's long as I've got good wind."

Meeting a young man unusually well dressed at a mountain "court day," we asked if he was a teacher.

"No," he answered; "I couldn't get nary certificate."

"What are you doing, may I ask?"

"I'm tendin' some churches," was the unabashed reply.

And in proportion to their lack of education is their sectarian assurance. We found four kinds of Baptists, each refusing to recognize the validity of the ordinances as performed by the others.

In order to appeal to their strong religious sentiments, and yet avoid sectarian entanglements, we confined our preaching pretty closely to the Ten Commandments and a few undisputed but neglected truths and duties. If we preached to Baptists, they paid us the compliment of saying, "That's good Baptist doctrine." If we were among Methodists they, too, claimed us. On one occasion they came to our guide to ask to what "persuasion" we belonged. His answer was diplomatic: "If you air a preacher, and hev got yer Bible, and then can't spot yer man when ye hear him, I hain't a-goin' ter tell ye."

Following our tour of observation, we sent out a quartette of singers—a Berea teacher, a student of mature years, and a man and his wife who had been born in the mountains but educated in Berea. This "troupe" gives two entertainments on successive nights in the same place, and a varied programme of songs and addresses. They are followed from place to place by crowds of young people on horseback. The entertainments are given at night, and during the day the quartette disperses to visit schools and homes. Hospitality is unbounded, and many of the most important lessons are given at the fireside. Not infrequently the people will keep us awake till a late hour with questions, and sleep on the floor to give us a bed.

And this reminds us of the surprising propriety with which a dozen people of both sexes can sleep in the same room. Such an arrangement is expected on the occasion of all great gatherings, and is the regular way of living in most households. A lady of our party once went alone to lodge with an old

couple whose children were all married and gone. The lady was shown into one of the two rooms of the house, and the hostess kindly said, "Now there air plenty of beds in this room. Me and my ole man generally sleep in the other room, but if you air the least mite lonesome we will come in here and sleep."

Each year the work has become more systematic and effective, and with increasing acquaintance we can profitably make a longer stay in each place. This makes the work much less arduous, especially for our ladies. One way of unobtrusively correcting the grotesque ideas disseminated by the mountain preachers has been to send a lady teacher to give "Bible readings." There is the utmost reverence for the Bible, and while religious teaching by a man would be watched for points of controversy, and religious teaching by a woman would be considered out of place, the reading of select portions of Scripture, with natural explanations, meets with nothing but open-mouthed and grateful attention. Mrs. Yocum, of our Normal Department, accompanied by her little son, rode above five hundred miles the past summer.

As our illustrations show, there has been opportunity for not a few observations of mountain life which have been instructive and exciting to the lecturers themselves. "Known to be preachers or as good as preachers," they move among the roughest people with entire safety, and even find permission to photograph a moonshine still. And many are the tales of adventure connected with the late war—border tales that remind us of the Revolution—recounted by our friendly hosts. The mountain people were divided, though the greater part were steadfast in loyalty to the old flag.

"Were you in the war?"

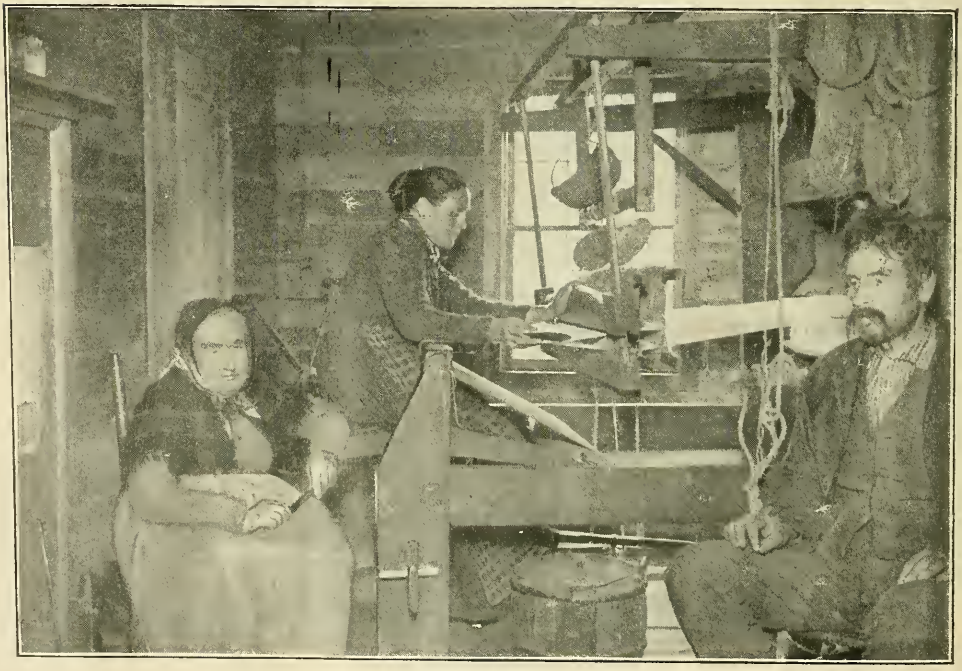
"Yes, sir; I was one of Morgan's horse-thieves."

"How fast could you ride when the Yanks were after you?"

"Well, I couldn't ride fast enough, fer they caught me and sent me up into Ohier."

Jackson County, Kentucky, claims to have sent more men into the Union Army in proportion to its population than any other county in the Nation. It is one of twenty contiguous counties without a printing-press. They adjourned court there to listen to a talk on education, and at its close one of the natives said, "Stranger, I could understand right smart of what you was a-tellin'. We had an officer in our regiment from New York or summers what spoke the same dialect as yeou do!"

The characters of the Craddock tales are easily verified in these excursions as types of



HAND LOOM

AMERICAN HIGHLANDERS

real life, as well as Abe Shivers, and Easter, the lovely heroine of John Fox's "Mountain Europa." Mr. Cable has touched mountain life only in "John March, Southerner," but his pictures are very characteristic. Lillian Bell, in her "Little Sister to the Wilderness," has given a picture of similar life in western Tennessee, and a word from her preface justly describes some of our highland friends

"I have been led by the cry of the inarticulate, of that large, not-to-be-ignored portion of humanity whose thoughts need an interpreter; who, with womanish, nice perceptions, lack equally nice distinction in terms to enable them to express the fine shades of meaning which it is their gift to feel.

"They belong to that vast majority of people who, when you have taken pity on their hesitation and finished their sentences for them, cry out to you in gratitude."

The native refinement of some of the mountain folk is surprising. The women commonly wear knitted woolen mitts at all public gatherings, even in the summer-time, as a tribute to conventionality. Many a girl who has come to us barefooted, and without so much as a night-robe or an "individual comb," has been transformed within six months into a neat and self-possessed young woman, whose humble origin would not be suspected.

The extension work has not been merely a series of excursions. We feel that there has been too much "touring" and "exploiting" of the mountains even by well-meaning preachers, who have made no provision for permanent results, and who seem to the people rather irresponsible. The university extension work has been purposeful from the start. It has proceeded from one well-known center, and the people have felt that "that thar College at Bereer what old Fee and Cassius Clay started before the Wah, is a-sendin' these speakers." It has been made personal and "friendly" by the acquaintance of a few Berea students even from the most remote counties.

And the lines of effort have been well defined. The problem is to make the belated dwellers in the hills sharers in the best elements of our civilization. This is quite unique as an educational undertaking. There has never been such a problem before. We had, to be sure, a great Western frontier, but its pioneer settlements were always furnished with some proportion of educated men, and were closely bound to the older parts of the country. But in the case of this vast mountain region

LOG SCHOOL-HOUSE ON BUFFALO HILL

Attended by thirty-five pupils.

there is no such leaven, and no such bond of communion with the rest of the world. There has never been a clearer call for the intervention of some intelligent guiding force.

Two principles have been kept steadily in mind: In the first place, our aim has been to give the essential rather than the accidental elements of civilization—to make the people sharers in the best things, but leave them unsophisticated. We will not teach them to despise the log-cabin, but to adorn it. And, in the second place, we respect their sturdy independence and endeavor only to help them to help themselves. The work is interdenominational—we co-operate with all Christian bodies. Instruction in the arts of life—hygiene, forestry, thrift, etc., is provided to give them at once new motives and new resources. And, above all, we propose to teach them to make the most of the common schools, which are barely in existence but have in them the germs of all good.

The States concerned in Appalachian America are all poor, inexperienced in popular education, and wholly unable to deal with the mountain problem. In many localities the school-houses are so far apart that half the population is practically debarred. The schools are so short that little learning is possible for the pupil, and little professional equipment for the teacher. And, finally, there is no one in the district who has an ideal of what a school ought to be.

To meet these conditions extension work seems more practicable and useful than great "conventions" or "conferences." The conference brings together those already interested; the extension work wakes up the people who are indifferent. Various forms of instruction are adopted. The popular lecture "The Ladder of Success" has been given hundreds of times. Talks on United States history are enjoyed by young and old. Discourses on how to make the most of the

A MOONSHINE STILL

The lecturer was led to this spot blindfolded, and the proprietor of the still prudently turned his back.

free school, the duties of school trustees, etc., and special meetings for farmers, for housewives, for preachers, and for teachers, are examples of the varied adaptations. Not least important is the discourse on "Arbitration," or "How to Settle Family Feuds without Bloodshed." Extension libraries and extension publications have been used as freely as our means would permit, and have helped to make the long period of "bad roads" less a time of mere hibernation in the mountains.

Very considerable results are already apparent. The people begin to understand what education means. New topics of thought and conversation are introduced. New standards are set up. The tone and even the outward appearance of many communities has been noticeably changed. And a very furor of desire for more of the same thing has been awakened.

Our lecturers not only give but gather much useful information, picking up old English ballads with interesting variants, and collecting countless "specimens" of old-time customs as well as other fossils from the hills.

We cannot allow our clients, the mountain people, to be called ignorant, for that term implies a certain moral delinquency. Rather let us paraphrase it and say that, like the patriarchs, they are unaware of the distinctive features of modern life.

Nor are they to receive this service at our hands simply because of their need. We need them also. What does America need so much as Americans? And here they are—vigorous, unjaded of nerve, prolific, patriotic—full of the blood and spirit of Seventy-six. For many years they will not need a university; but if they are to be set in step with the world, and saved from the corrupting influence of the baser elements of civilization, they must have the sympathetic and skillful guidance of this university extension work.

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